

# BRAWLER'S ALLEY

ISSUE 01 jun 22

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA

TURTLES

SHREDDER'S  
REVENGE

REVIEW

PLUS: FINAL VENDETTA

Game Review & Dev Interview

CONTRACT KILLER

Game Review

MAYHEM  
BRAWLER II

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

FIRST  
LOOK

WE GOT  
EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO  
MAYHEM BRAWLER II  
FIRST DEV DIARY



# BRAWLER'S ALLEY



**WARNING**







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**COVER STORY****TMNT: SCHREDDER'S REVENGE**

COWABUNGA! The Turtles are back, dudes!! Shredder is once again planning something evil and only the four green heroes can stop him (again). But they are not alone this time, Splinter and April joins the fight in this new beat'em up game from Tribute Games.

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## ALLEY'S SPECIALS

### CONTRACT KILLER

When an Evil Contract is forcing all your friends to a legal demise, the only solution is to listen to the words of your master, keep a good posture and take the matter in your own hands. Prepare to face the most menacing office utensils you ever seem!

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### FINAL VENDETTA

Final Vendetta brings the 90s back with a packed action beat'em up that will put your skills to the test. Prepare to face hordes of street thugs across six levels and save your little sister from the Syndic-8 in this retro-inspired game.

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### MAYHEM BRAWLER II

Prepare yourself to dive in a fantasy world that will put your fists to the test! The sequel to Mayhem Brawler is shaping up to be one of the most ambitious beat'em ups ever. Check out what Hero Concept is planning for a not so distant future.

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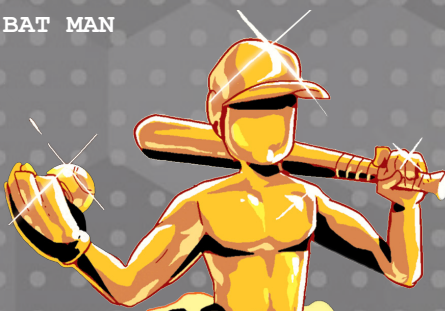


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# THIS IS WHY WE PLAY

"I fear not the man who has practiced 10.000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one 10.000 times." Years before the first beat'em up, actually, years before anything but Pong, Bruce Lee layed out the main mechanic of the every side scrolling beat em up.:

Discipline and repetition.

You know the drill, walk right, kick and punch the same pallet swapped foes, in the same place with the same moves. For an outsider, this would sound like a dull experience that gets old very quickly but, for us, fans of this old genre, there's beauty in repetition, there's challenge and there's knowledge.

When you start a brand new game, there's always the suspense of what's coming next, you never know what crazy type of goons will come to get you. You are there alone, or at least outnumbered, every step bringing more danger than the last one, but you keep going on, blind. Of course, your enemies are always weaker than you at first and you know that, you walk confidently for a while, beating everyone in your way, until that moment you find yourself surrounded by your foes and half of your life bar vanishes in a blink of an eye.

You freeze inside.

You know, from that moment, it's on! The machine wants you dead. And you will die. Countless horrible deaths. And time and time again you will rise, you will learn from your mistakes, you will reach further and further and you will repeat the same kick 10.000 times.

After some time you learn all the patterns. You foresee all the tricks. There's no longer surprises or pitfalls in your path. You have mastered the machine. From that point, one could think that the game is over, there's nothing else to achieve.

What they don't know is, from that moment, you become your greatest foe. You are the one to be beaten. You start to impose challenges on yourself. Speed runs, combo runs, no special runs, one credit runs.

No deaths!

The ultimate self inflicted punishment that every avid beat'em up player aims for. The perfect run.

This is why we play.

To challenge ourselves, to surpass our limits, to repeat the same kick 10.000 times until we achieve perfection.

It has been like this for almost 40 years now. Hundreds of games were made, countless hours were spent standing up in arcades or sitting on our knees in front of old TV Sets seeking perfection.

Beat'em ups are arguably one of the responsables for popularizing video games. It is the reason that many of us are gamers now, even those who don't play the genre anymore.

But it wasn't a smooth ride. It had just a few years of greatness in the late 80s, early 90s, followed by a huge downfall just a few years later, with few and sparse releases, being very few as good as the old ones.

Only in the late 2000s, with the consolidation of the indie scene, the genre could breathe a little again. After 2010 beat em ups were "a thing" once more, with a handful of releases per year, but with a clear increase in quality. Then came 2019 and beat em ups were cool again. Everywhere in the mainstream media you could find people talking about beating goons in the streets once more.



Which brings us to 2022. A year with dozens of games being released, from all corners of the world, with every type imaginable of characters. Beat'em ups are reborn.

It is hard to tell what the future of beat'em ups will be. We now have indie studios being born every year. We have talented people from all over the world, bringing all sorts of ideas to the table. Showing us that, far from dead, the side-scrolling beat'em ups still have a lot to offer for those who look for new and bigger challenges.

Here, at Brawler's Alley, we believe that the genre will never see the kind of drought we saw in the mid 2000s. Those kids and teens from the golden age are now doing their own games and never before publishing and advertising a game was so easy. But, at the same time, a good game can be lost in the crowd. What was said for beat'em ups is also true for all the other genres. Hundreds of games of every kind are being released everyday, often overloading the player with so many titles that one alone can't follow everything going on.

That's our mission. We are here to give the good games a place to be recognized, to stand over the crowd. We want you to play the best of the best, we want you to be aware of the greatest brawlers coming up, we want you to practice the same kick 10.000 times. We hope, sincerely, that you enjoy what we are creating here. A magazine made by old fans of Beat'Em Ups for all fans, old and new, for all ages, from all ages.

*Ricardo Savino*





# UNDERSTANDING BEAT'EM UPS

By Scottie J.

## INTRODUCTION

Beat'em ups as a genre have existed as a staple of gaming for well over 30 years. In that time they have had a long and rich history of titles across several arcade, PC, and home consoles. In this article I am looking to explain some of the deeper concepts of playing these games to help new and long-time players gain a better understanding on how they can elevate their play beyond what they may have tried in the past.

While not every game will follow every idea presented here, I have broken down basic strategies into the following sections that will work in most every beat'em up you apply them to. With all of that out of the way let's move onto the first section.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR MOVE SET

On the surface you will immediately notice your character's basic attacks, but be sure to test out other ways of fighting as well to help you gain an understanding of how you can best handle the enemies you will be working through as the game progresses. Move lists in a beat'em up can be very simple with standard strings, jump and dashing attacks, as well as an Extra Joy (Sometimes known as a super move or Mega Crash). Or they may be much more complex affairs that involve special move inputs, contextual attacks, or grappling systems that give much more freedom during a fight.

When first getting into a game be sure to explore the individual characters to see what their strengths and weaknesses are, and the tools they have at their disposal. Most games will have at least three characters that feature different fighting styles, so be sure to have fun with them and see which one offers what you may want as a player. Experiment with what properties a move may have such as invincibility, extra range, or even area of effect that can dispatch several enemies at once.



To end this section I would also like to highlight that you shouldn't be afraid of your Extra Joy attack. While the move will usually take health to use it can be an essential tool in some situations to avoid them snowballing out of control. If used correctly you will see that the health spent is a small price for what could have been lost if you had avoided using the move.

## CROWD CONTROL

From there we transition into how to clear stages more effectively. As the hoards come your way an understanding of how to control the situation through crowd control will be invaluable. Enemies will come at you from all directions, so take time to learn when and where they will spawn as well as the types of attacks they want to use against you. Pay attention and try to prioritize handling the enemies that cause the highest threat to your game plan. It will also be a benefit to avoid allowing enemies to surround your position or approach from behind.

In a challenging beat'em up situation can become overwhelming in an instant and lead to a quick loss of a credit if you lack the understanding of how to clear a wave in an efficient manner. Stage hazards and ranged enemies tend to be the most common form of disruption you will see, and after gaining experience in the general flow of a game you will be able to more easily discern when and where you will need to be in any given situation as well as what your priorities will be when trying to finish an encounter with as little damage as possible.





One note to keep in mind when practicing this concept will be how to most safely approach an enemy. You will generally need to move in the enemies direction with an offset to avoid taking damage as depending on the enemies tools or aggression they will quickly put a stop to your advances with an attack of their own if you go at them head on. Be aware that some enemies are also designed to knock you out of the air if you jump at them, so if you notice this be sure to approach them with caution.

Understanding the bias of your attacks to hit higher or lower than your current position will aid in making sure when you are in range of the enemy you will be at the advantage. Keep calm, and understand what you can do at any given moment and you will begin to see more progression in your play time with less wasted health or lives.



Finally take note of any changes in an enemy you have seen before. Generally speaking when encountering a different colored variant of an enemy you have encountered in the past they will be far more dangerous in terms of damage, but they also may have an updated move list as well. Learning to notice how these variations work and change will greatly improve survivability in later stages.

## BOSS ENCOUNTERS

Beat'em up bosses will tend to be a test of everything you have learned so far in a given game with some additional challenge thrown in as well with unique mechanics or attacks. While most beat'em up bosses may seem overpowered in the beginning you can use your own observations to make short work of even the hardest of them. Watch for certain habits a boss may employ. Do they do something when you jump? Are there certain patterns to their attacks? At what ranges do they tend to become more or less aggressive? How long between, or at what amount of health do they call in support from basic enemies?



These are all questions you can ask yourself when in a boss encounter. take note of how many attacks you are able to perform before they try and counter you as well as if the boss is possible to be thrown or in any other way stunned in a way where you can land extra amounts of damage. With patience as well as some trial and error you will start to uncover the moving parts to a bosses design and in turn have much more consistent fights with them.

## HAVE FUN AND PRACTICE

As with any game you are going to see the best results when you really put in the effort to practice and learn how to execute on everything you have learned. Observe and keep in mind anything you notice in the game, then try and apply those learnings in different areas of a title to try and unravel the puzzle of how the game works both in your favor or against you.

Don't be afraid to lose a few credits, take some damage, or use risky strategies to make it through a tricky situation. You will always be able to come back and see how much better you can do with your newfound knowledge and skills. Before you know it, sections or bosses that may have felt very unfair or difficult when you started will absolutely crumble under you once you have the strategies and patterns under your belt.

## LAST THOUGHTS

The beat'em up genre can be enjoyed by all types of players, both casual or more serious as well as anyone in between. I hope this article has helped shed more light on how these games can be approached, and possibly have helped you in finding new ways to enjoy some of your favorite titles.

This has been Scottie from Belt Action Central.







# CONTRACT KILLER

**D**o you know that not every hero wears a cape? Some of them use lead, paint or ink to save the day. This is what you are about to learn in *Contract Killer*, an "erase'em up" from Paperboy Games, that will take you in a fun adventure across a world made of paper, ink, and lot's of bad contracts.

## STORY LINE

Stories are never the strong point of beat'em ups. Rare are the titles that try to create a more complex narrative with twists and serious plot points. *Contract Killer* isn't one of those games. It is a story of revenge of a dead master but, at least, it tries to put a new coat of paint over an old story. You start your journey as Leadehead, a disciple from the great Era-sir, a master of the art of erasing bad contracts. Unfortunately your master perished after facing the Contract of all Contracts, which binded all the inhabitants of this world to a terrible and legal demise. Now, it is up to Leadhead and his friends to erase these bad deals once and for all.

It is your basic beat'em up story, but with a theme and moments so out of the ordinary that you can't help but smile while you follow the adventures of a very angry pencil. The interactions between the playable character with the bosses are very funny to read and, if you face it with a light heart, will make you laugh more than once.

Sure, a story where your main enemy is a terrible and evil contract that people are forced to sign is something that you can expand in a debate and talk about the political and economical implications of it, or even about duties and freedom and the relation between employers and employees in the current world. But, for this review, we will focus only on the revenge of a pencil for his fallen master.

## GRAPHICS

**A**s soon as you start the game, you can see that the graphics were clearly inspired by *Paper Mario*. The 2D paper-like characters, the 3D low-poly world and objects, all of this reminds of the adventures of Nintendo's N°1 plumber.

But, different from Mario's outing, don't expect to find anything too fancy here. The 3D models are low poly, often with very basic texture and shaders, the backgrounds are a mix of 3D models and 2D crop outs of stores and houses and, while simple, they are good enough to draw your attention to some visual gags that you may find in your outings. There's nothing, at the end, to write home about. We're not saying the game is ugly, not at all, it is simplicity works in its favor.

The characters and enemies are extremely well done and colorful, which helps to always have them standing out in the world making it very easy to keep track of what's happening on the screen.







While the graphics are nothing to write home about, when it comes to animation, there's something here to write to the whole town. Everything is very well done, from the characters' punches to their emotes, you can see them oozing personality all over the screen! You can see, right from the start, how adorable your characters are from the way they move. I mean, they don't have legs, and you can see and feel their movement feels right when they wiggle their bodies up and down in the most lovely ways. They even have their own walk cycle.



What, for a bunch of legless creatures, is something worth noting. When it comes to your enemies, they don't have the same level of animation of our main heroes, but that didn't stop the developers to infuse tons of personality and work in each enemy. Instead of the simple palette swap that we are used to seeing in games like this, the devs opted for a complete overhaul of the enemies where each pallet swap is actually a complete reskin to fit the theme of the current map. From the city streets, throughout the beach until the office building, every single enemy will be dressed accordingly! For a small team this was a lot of effort and, in my opinion, is something that bigger studios should learn from.

All of these aspects combined gives the game an arts and crafts feel that is made even more evident due to its simplicity, like a work of someone very talented, but not experienced enough. It won't earn the developers any prize, but its charm will, in the end, earn your admiration.



## SOUND & MUSIC

This admiration will be even more deserved when you listen to the soundtrack. The composer, Aiden Jauffret, went above and beyond in his research, taking inspiration from old and new classics. You can hear the clear Cuphead inspiration by the instruments chosen and the jazz roots of the melodies, but you can also notice games like Zelda and Mario as inspiration, with some grand moments, with lots of instruments at the same time, playing some vibrant and upbeat tunes while you cause havoc.

Going a little further, the tunes have a certain charm and a traditional jazz structure, where the composer holds on notes a little more than you expected or cuts it short abruptly, creating that little bit of tension in an otherwise chilling musical experience. It could be a little strange to find a jazzy soundtrack in a game like this, where often you listen to heavy guitars or electronic music, but it works pretty well, mainly because of the cartoony vibe of the world. In the end, it is a strange and refreshing experience that breaks from the conventions of the genre and puts something new on the table. A risk only an indie team would be brave enough to take.



However, not everything is on par with the soundtrack. Most of the sound effects are fairly mundane and, while effective, have nothing special. But to be fair, you are punching paper and briefcases, so, there isn't much you can do with it. The only real downside with the sounds are the specials. They are often louder than the general sound of the game and if you try to revive a fallen friend, you will be assaulted by the loudest beep you ever hear in your life. It all sounds even more pronounced due the relaxing pace of the music. Gladly this isn't anything you will hear often, but your ears will curse a little when you do.



## GAMEPLAY & COMBAT



Now, let's talk about what really matters, gameplay and combat. After all, this is what makes or breaks a beat 'em up. The game gives you the option of 4 different characters that, while all writing utensils, are pretty different from each other. They all range from the fast and combo oriented to the more tank type, with strong and slow attacks and even their projectiles have different speeds and range.

Leadhead, the pencil, is your all around character, fast and strong enough to make you comfortable with the game. Penn, the... well... penn, is the slowest of them all, but also the strongest and probably the hardest character to master. Mark, the marker, is a little faster than leadhead and strong as him, making Mark a good choice for fast and effective attacks. And finally Pomp, the brush, which is the fastest of them all, with a lot of potential for combos and chain sequences that can end a group of enemies easily. You'll have to earn these characters. At first only Leadhead is available and the others are locked behind the story, but won't be long until you unlock your first extra character.

All of them have different types of specials that work in a similar way. Here you have your special bar that refills as you beat your enemy down or when they beat you down. You have two types of special, one that you can use any time you want tapping the Special Button, and a stronger special attack that you can only use when your bar is full holding the same button for a moment.



For the other attacks, they are basically the same for everyone, your light attack varies between the heroes in strength and speed. You have a heavy attack that works as a projectile and, if you use it with the directional you have a corkscrew attack that can pierce through your enemies and will grant you a small window of invincibility, making this also your dodge move. The ground pound, performed with jump and heavy attack, seems to be very similar between our heroes and the grab always throws your enemies and objects to your back, except in Pomp's case.

All these moves are very responsive and fast and in no time you will find the best combination of attacks to each enemy. The controls feel solid, the attacks land in a very satisfying way just like the specials that, despite the not stellar sound effects, are very fun to use.

This vast selection of attacks will be put to good use against a small, but fun, cast of characters. You don't have a huge variety of enemies but you have all the basic ones, punchers, sliders, projectile throwers, grabbers, shield bearers and so on. Nothing very fancy but enough to keep you busy. Even more when they come in huge numbers which isn't that rare. The devs compensated for the lack of variety with a huge number of them on the screen, letting you so busy trying to survive that you won't even notice that you are beating the same enemy for the 100th time. The environment also can be your enemy if you don't take enough care. Scattered throughout

the levels you will find explosive barrels that can make it or break it for you. They are a powerful force but the same damage they deal on your enemies they will deal on you and your friends.

You won't find, unfortunately, a single weapon in this game aside from some boxes and tires but they not always can be called effective. Sometimes they can even get in your way.







As for the AI of the enemies it is a little on the simpler side. Enemies will try to surround you and they know how to counter your attacks but sometimes they seem to get tired of the fight and simply wander off the screen just to come back a little bit later ready to get you. Others sometimes will just switch off and passively accept the beating until their demise. This is not uncommon as I wish it to be but doesn't break the game or the challenge.



With all highs and lows counted, what you get is a satisfying combat experience which will make you run all around your screen punching and piercing through your enemies, keeping them the maximum amount of time you can in the air to keep that combo counter growing. And you will have to do this throughout nine levels in 3 distinct worlds (streets, beach and office building), which will take you about 1 hour and a half to beat, if you are used to these games and a little more if you're not.



The game can become a little challenging at later levels if you are unsure of what you're doing, especially due to the fact that you have only one life and 5 bars of energy that your enemies can take with ease. Most enemies will deal you half bar of damage with a simple attack but some can cost you a bar and a half if you're not careful. ✨



## CONCLUSION

Overall this is a very good beat 'em up, with nice and charming characters, graphics that, while not groundbreaking, works fine with the theme of the game, a fantastic soundtrack and a solid and deep combat. If you are a fan of the genre, you can't go wrong with this game. If you're just curious about beat 'em ups and the last one you played was Streets of Rage 4, you have here an experience that is different enough to be worthy of your time and money. In a year crowded with beat em ups, Contract Killer is a good choice for those who are looking for something different than the traditional beat em up where you have the same big guy trying to save the city, the girlfriend or the president's daughter.

This one, checks all the right boxes.

RECOMMENDED







# Dungeons & Dragons

SHADOW OVER MYSTARA

CAPCOM  
COIN-OP. INC.

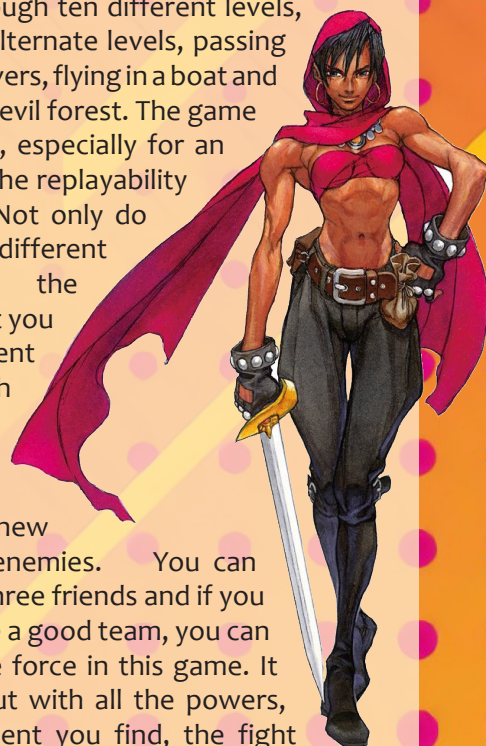
## Shadow over Mystara

You can't talk about beat'em ups without talking about Capcom. The Japanese company, during the nineties, was one the best around releasing amazing titles one after another. From the debut of Final Fight until its last days as a beat'em up powerhouse at the arcades and consoles, Capcom never disappointed. They had great titles coming from franchises like The Punisher, Dungeons and Dragons, Alien vs Predator, even Cadillac, to their original IPs like Captain Commando, which was briefly Capcom's mascot, Armored Warriors and the last Capcom entry on the genre, Battle Circuit.

But there was one game that took the beat'em ups genre to a new level, Dungeons and Dragons Shadows of Mystara. One of the last arcade beat'em up from Capcom which featured a multi-path story game, with different characters, a leveling system, and different endings. You even had an inventory to store items you find in the level and even different types of magic. Sure, today we have some beat'em ups that mix all those elements and, even at the time, this game wasn't really this first of its kind, not even for Capcom, who already had made the also fantastic Dungeon and Dragons Tower of Doom but it was arguably the best. Sure, it was a coin muncher as every other game at the arcades, but it was so beautifully made, so interesting and so new that you could help but throw all your money at it.



The game offers six playable characters from the D&D universe, The Dwarf, The Thief, The Cleric, The Fighter, The Wizard and The Elf. All of them have their specific traits and differences in attack, speed, resistance and powers they could use. You have to travel through ten different levels, not counting the alternate levels, passing through villages, rivers, flying in a boat and crawling across an evil forest. The game is substantially big, especially for an arcade game and the replayability is off the charts. Not only do you have the six different characters and the alternate paths but you will also find different equipment for each of your characters, giving them different powers and giving you new ways to face your enemies. You can play it with up to three friends and if you know how to make a good team, you can be an unstoppable force in this game. It is a hard game, but with all the powers, items and equipment you find, the fight becomes a little more fair.



The game is currently available on the Wii U, and not on the Nintendo Switch, for reasons this writer will never be able to understand, Xbox Series and Steam. This is a game that, in case you missed, you need to have in your collection. Call some friends, get some drinks, some snacks, and prepare to have one of the best nights of your life fighting goblins and skeletons, exploring dungeons and killing dragons in a fantastic and well crafted pixelated world. ✱



*BEATS FROM THE PAST*



**CAPCOM**  
COIN-OP, INC.

# Dungeons & Dragons

## SHADOW OVER MYSTARA™

### THE SEQUEL



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- 18 NEW LEVELS
- MULTIPLE PATHS ALLOW HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT VARIATIONS
- MORE SPECIAL ITEMS AND SPELLS
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- RETRO FIT FOR D&D I AVAILABLE



# FINAL VENDETTA

## MIKE TUCKER TALKS RETRO

**W**e talked to Mike Tucker, director of Final Vendetta, about his inspirations, challenges and plans to future. Mike has 27 years of experience with the industrie and now runs its own company, Bitmap Bureau, which is famous for its amazing retro-games. The company make games for current platforms, but also made games for Genesis/Mega Drive, Dreamcast and Neo Geo. Anyone can see there's a lot of passion for retro-consoles here too so, let's hear what Mike has to say.



**BA** - So, Mike, 27 years of industry. What brought you to videogames and how it was to develop in the late 90's compared with today?

**MT** - It's certainly been a long time! Like many people in the industry I was hooked on video games from a young age, and they were always a big part of my life. It was arcade titles such as Xevious and Gradius that really grabbed me, and I'd spend a lot of time going to various friends' houses to play on their computers such as the ZX Spectrum, BBC Micro and Commodore 64. At the age of 19 I applied for a local job as a games tester with Sales Curve Interactive and was fortunate enough to get it - testing isn't as much fun as it might sound but I stuck with it and eventually moved onto level design, game design and programming.

Things are certainly very different in the industry now, where just about anyone can have a go at developing a game and getting it out there - back in the 80's and 90's it was much more specialized of course.

**BA** - You start your career in the traditional industry and now, for 12 years, you have been an "indie" developer. What made you take such a decision?



**MT** - When I started Megadev I had just been made redundant from a studio that was developing mobile phone games, which I'd been doing for about 6 years at that point. I had a certain amount of freedom in terms of design in those years but really wanted to start making my own titles, and I couldn't see myself working for anyone else after that point.

**BA** - Is there anything you would change in your path after all those years?

**MT** - I wish I would have gone independent sooner, but it's difficult when you have a steady job doing what you love - being made redundant gave me the impetus to finally do that though.

**BA** - Your last 3 games (88 heroes - Ninja Showdown - XenoCrisis) were very fast paced platforms and an incredible action-packed twin stick shooter. What made you guys decide for a beat'em up this time? It is a very different style of game.

**MT** - I've wanted to make a beat'em up for many years now, having been a huge fan of Double Dragon and Final Fight, Streets Of Rage 2 and versus fighters such as Street Fighter 2, King Of Fighters '96 etc. Beat 'em ups require a huge amount of character art though, and it's hard to find someone capable of generating the amount of art required in a timely manner - that changed when we stumbled upon the artist for Final Vendetta though.







**BA** - The game clearly has a lot of influence from Streets of Rage and Final Fight, what else would you say was your inspiration for this game?

**MT** - You'll probably notice touches from various beat 'em ups including the ground attacks from the original Vendetta / Crime Fighters 2, the back attacks from Double Dragon, juggle combos from SSF2T, dodging and running from SOR3 etc. I think the biggest innovation is perhaps the block button, which you'll need to use strategically. The music is very much influenced by the likes of the Prodigy and various techno / dance acts too.

**BA** - The soundtrack is incredibly good, how was the process of composing it? How hard was it to pick the right music to the right stage?

**MT** - The music was composed largely by our good friend Lee James, who is a local producer and DJ that goes under the name "Featurecast". He was already a huge fan of Streets Of Rage so this was the dream project for him - we got together in the early stages of the game's development and came up with a playlist of tracks that we thought would suit the action, including dance, hip-hop, techno, rave, jungle, gabber and garage. Lee then went away and created a ton of tracks and we picked our favourites then assigned them to the levels where we felt they worked best. Some tracks were written specifically for certain scenarios though.

**BA** - Final Vendetta will also be available for Neo Geo, which never was a big platform for beat'em ups and, honestly, never had a great one. Why did you take this decision?

**MT** - It always puzzled me that the Neo Geo never had a truly great beat 'em up - Burning Fight, Mutation Nation and Sengoku are reasonable, but we wanted to try to improve on them with a classic brawler that could (hopefully) compare to Final Fight and Streets Of Rage 2. Having released Xeno Crisis on the Neo Geo we were keen to create a title specifically for the Neo Geo too, so a beat 'em up seemed like the perfect fit.

**BA** - Modern platforms, with all their power, can allow you to implement a lot of features and cool things in a beat'em up. Did you have to change your view because of Neo Geo? Or was it the other way around, you picked the neo geo as base and ported to modern platforms?

**MT** - Final Vendetta was created specifically for the Neo Geo, but it made sense to also bring it to modern platforms so that more people could enjoy it. For me, I don't really see much benefit (if any) when developing 2D pixel art titles on anything more powerful than 32 or even 16 bit.



**BA** - The animation of the characters and NPCs is simply amazing. What can you tell us about the process of animating the game?

**MT** - We came across our artist Jabir after noticing the quality of his sprite edits - it's the closest we've seen to SNK's original style. He tends to draw each frame very simply to start with, colouring each body part with a unique colour, then he goes back and shades afterwards. You can see an example at the bottom of this page.



**BA** - And for the future? Do you guys have any plans that you can share with us? Or this a subject for a future interview?

**MT** - Next up is the Neo Geo version of Final Vendetta which we hope to release later in the year. We also have a couple of big projects that are in progress but that's all we can say for now! It's safe to say that we will continue to develop games for retro hardware though. ✨





# FINAL VENDETTA



**W**hen it comes to beat'em ups, only a few franchises grab the attention of the general public. Usually they are well known IPs, with a vast history, fan base, and heavy marketing campaigns behind it to keep the hype going on. Most of the games from this genre, more often than not, will mostly grab the attention of old fans of beat'em ups, but that's not always the case.

Final Vengeance, althtought their devs have a great reputation creating retro games, is a brand new and unproven IP. And yet, it made more noise than other great beat'em ups that were released this year and years before. Is this hype justified? Or are we just facing a good marketing campaign? Well, we brought this game to the Alley and had a long talk with it so we could get some answers. And we got them, right here!

## STORY LINE

**O**ur story begins with Claire, one of the three playable characters, answering a phone just to find out that her sister, Juliette, was kidnapped by the Syndic-8 and will set her free after Claire does a job for them. Now it is time for her and two friends, Miller and Duke, who happened to be right at her side at the time of the phone call, to pay the ransom with the blood of the kidnappers. I have to admit that even for a beat'em up the story is quite simple. We don't have the name of the city (it's London), we don't know who the Syndic-8 is or even why Claire is important to them. All we got beyond the introduction of the game is a simple description for each character in the manual.

Yes, this is a pure arcade beat'em up in terms of story, just like Burning Fight or Mutation Nation, with almost no background information of who you are or who you are facing. It is a straightforward affair, hit the streets and punch some bad guys in the face. And that's all we need to know.

## GRAPHICS

**F**irst and foremost, we must have in mind that this is a Neo Geo game. The aim of the devs was to create a beat'em up true to its roots in the 90s and based everything here on the Neo Geo hardware so, do not expect here fancy light effects flashing on your screen or complex backgrounds, which, in all honesty, are a little on the weaker side here. You don't have much life happening in them, the colors are a little muted and you will get only one layer of parallax scrolling, what is expected for a Neo Geo game, but still can leave one disappointed when you have other games on the market doing much more in terms of graphics.

Sure, we have to keep in mind the capabilities of the hardware the game was developed for and, when you compare with other Neo Geo beat'em ups, what you have here is pretty good. At the same time, the majority of the players won't be Neo Geo owners, afterall, the game was also created to run on modern hardware and people expecting modern flairs here may be a little disappointed with such lifeless backgrounds.







But the characters won't disappoint you here. They are incredibly well made and well animated. Vibrant colors, lots of frames for each of the playable characters and enemies and some of them even have some nice idle animations. You can see Miller's mullets flying around when he punches, or Duke's jacket swaying when he runs or the way some enemies are just chilling around before your arrival. It is all very reminiscent of SNK style of animation, with high frame counts and silk-smooth moves that will catch your attention from the start. They are also very detailed.



All enemies and characters are extremely good-looking, making good use of the colors and low resolution of the sprites. It's impressive how much personality they were able to put on each of the characters you will see on your screen. And I have not even talked about the bosses yet.

The bosses are all huge, as expected, and Bitmap Bureau took advantage of this tradition to deliver some of the most detailed bosses you will see in a pixel-art beat'em up. I won't spoil too much here, but there are a pair of brazilian bosses that are fantastic to watch, from the clothing to the hair, everything is so detailed and accurate, that it's hard to go back and complain about the backgrounds. In the end, the graphics are a mixed bag and kind of hard to evaluate. For a Neo Geo game, we can't really complain about the dull backgrounds and muted colors. This is what the machine could do at the time but, for a game made in 2022, running in modern consoles, some may find the lack of life in the scenarios a little boring.



But let's be fair here, how many times, in a fast paced beat'em up, you stopped between two waves of enemies to smell the roses?





## SOUND & MUSIC

When it comes to the audio, there's little to nothing to complain about here. The sound of your punches, barrels smashed, or even some bones breaking are all very good. Your punches have a lower pitch than what are common in beat'em ups, it gives them a certain dryness that is very satisfying to hear every time. The objects that you can break also have a very good sound effect, with some metal barrels emitting an echo when you break them. Boxes, phone booths, trash cans, they all sound great when you hit them. It is a detail that can be easily overlooked by most devs, but here you can listen to the care they put in each sound clip.

The same can be said for the voices. They are crystal clear and, more important,

they don't repeat too often. There has been a trend lately where characters on the screen keep repeating ad nauseum the same voice clip with every move and this, late in the game, ends up being an annoyance for the player. Here you will listen to the same screams and grunts but they are varied enough to avoid stagnation.

This dedication, by the way, extends to the soundtrack. If you enjoy electronic music, you will love what the devs have in store for you here and, if you don't, you will see yourself enjoying it even against your will. The soundtrack is signed by Utah Saints and Featurecast, some very well known names in the electronic scene in the UK, and they did an outstanding job here. From the start screen to the end game there's no track that we didn't enjoy here. They all have a good beat and perfectly serve the mood of the game since they have a true feeling of music from the streets. You can get the best OST around, in any genre, and you hardly will find one that fits the game so well as the ones you will listen to here. It is a shame that we can't show it to you here in the magazine how good the OST is, but trust us, those are some tunes that will make Yuzo Koshiro raise his ears.

## COMBAT & GAMEPLAY

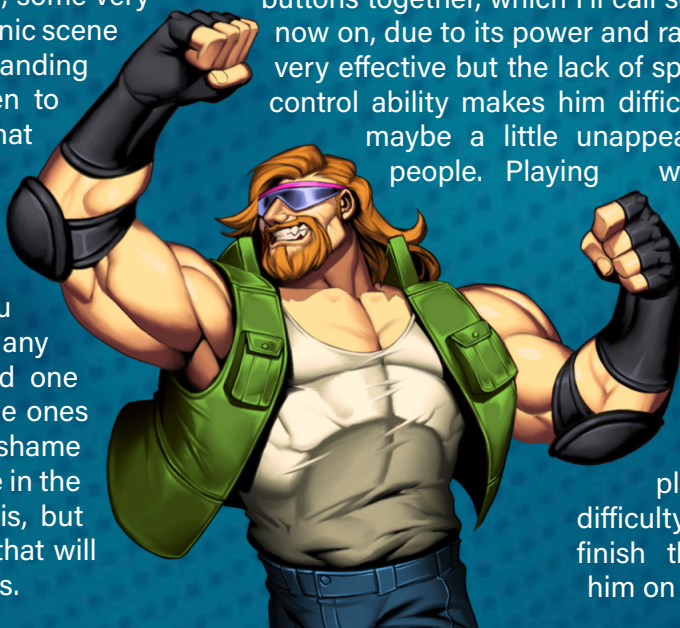
Now that we talk about everything that help making a good beat'em up, let's dive into what really makes or breaks one: Combat and Gameplay.



You have, as many of you already know by now, three playable characters. Claire, the fast but weaker character, Duke, the middleman, who is probably your best choice to get acquainted with the game and Miller, the tank.

Miller is the hardest character to use. He can do a lot of damage, but his slow speed and extremely powerful moves are best used to quickly finish an enemy than gather them around to finish them off. In his arsenal are mostly wrestling moves, with elbow blows, backdrops and a back breaker that will be your go to move to finish your enemies so satisfying it is. He can sprint like the others and he also has a devastating tornado punch released by pressing the jump and the special buttons together, which I'll call semi-super from now on, due to its power and range. He can be very effective but the lack of speed and crowd control ability makes him difficult to play and maybe a little unappealing for some people. Playing with him is more

a matter of style than anything else and the developers know that. So much so that if you want to play in the ultra difficulty, you must first finish the game with him on the hard mode.







Duke is well-suited to all types of players. He has enough strength to kill your enemies fast, but is also agile enough to let you gather big groups around to quickly dispatch them. He can juggle most enemies at will, which makes him a little overpowered after you master his moves. He has a powerful dragon punch and a cycling kick that can quickly eliminate all your enemies giving them no chance to react but don't go abusing too much, his juggles have only a few invincibility frames and enemies will be able to hit you from behind. His semi-super is a flurry of flaming fists that pushes him towards the enemy making this an easy way to approach a large group of enemies. He'll be without any doubt your best shot to first beat the game.



Claire is your typical female character from every beat'em up. She is extremely fast, deals little damage and has the smaller life bar. You can lose a life with a group of basic enemies if you get distracted for a second. But if you know how to use her, she will be your best option to deal with larger groups of enemies. Her agility combined with the lower impact of her moves is perfect for positioning a group of enemies wherever you desire in the scene and finishing them from there. Some of her moves, like the ultrasonic burst and semi-super, have enough reach to keep all your enemies at bay and enough strength to kill them without it becoming too repetitive. She also has a double kick which combined with the ultrasonic burst can create a very deadly combo sequence.

And you will be able to create all types of combos in this game. The amount of moves you have is really impressive if you consider the game uses only four buttons. Besides your regular attack, you have a very useful back kick that can be performed by pressing attack and the special button together and also can be used as a frontal attack if you press the directional together, you can stomp on fallen enemies and block incoming attacks.



Your grab move is also very versatile. Once you get hold of the thug, you can beat him with a normal attack, use the special button to perform a strong attack or even jump over them to change how they will be thrown. But nothing of this would really matter if it wasn't for the cancels in this game. You can cancel every move and everything is so snappy that your cancels can become part of your combos, creating even more devastating chains. The freedom you have with your combat in this game makes everything so fluid and precise that you'll keep playing just to see what kind of crazy chains you can create.



Your enemies come in all the familiar shapes and forms you already seem in these games. You have your typical cannon fodder, the fast and fatale female with a whip, the charging fat guy, the guy with the knives and some even with a handgun. A good thing here is their pallet swapped versions not only change colors and get stronger but also they can learn new moves and take you by surprise when you least expect it.





This maintains the game fresh and keeps you on your toes because you never know if a certain combo chain that was working so far will work on the next enemy. Something very welcome in a beat'em up.

The bosses are exactly what you'd expect from a game like this. They're all extremely strong and will put you down extremely easily if you don't take care enough. They don't have different phases of attacks (except for one boss) as one would expect in a modern beat'em up, they have a specific set of moves that they'll use until the last drop of life and you better learn them all if you want to survive. A few hits can cost you a life and they're fast enough to keep you busy trying to avoid their hits while looking for a chance to attack. These are classic boss battles where learning through repetition will be your best move.

Although everything seems solid at first look, for the more casual crowd, this game can have some problems. Enemies are way too fast and relentless and will pile up on you after you're knocked down, giving you almost no chance to recover if you don't know how to counter them. Some bosses can be a pain until you learn all their moves and the complete lack of continues or save states can be frustrating sometimes. That's right, when your lives gets to zero, is "high-score screen and game over ". It can be a little upsetting if you just want to finish the game, but if you're looking for challenges, there aren't many like this game around.

The game also offers a boss rush mode, a survival mode that can provide a more serious and competitive ground and a versus mode that can grant some casual fun between friends. None of these modes are very fleshed out here, having only the basic stuff that you can expect on this type of game.

Control-wise I have very few things to note here. Every move, every punch is snappy and responsive as it should be. You can pull all moves with ease and even the moves that use combined buttons here are pretty fast and will never fail you. With that said, the only problem you may find with the controllers is the button layout. Don't get me wrong, the devs give you 24 configurations of controller to choose but, unfortunately, none of them makes use of the shoulder buttons. No matter the configuration you choose, it is all about the face buttons. Normally this wouldn't be a problem, but when you have moves that use combinations with two buttons, having at least the block set to the shoulder buttons can do wonders to the gameplay. Yes, this is a Neo Geo game and I am pretty sure that

it is better to play with an arcade controller but you must give your audience a little bit of freedom when it comes to controls.

Most of us will play this game with a gamepad. ✖



## CONCLUSION

In the end, Final Vendetta is a very good beat'em up. It is a game that takes the expression "arcade experience" and makes it literal, not only a nod to the graphics from the past. Created and tailored for the hardcore, here's a game that will keep you busy for dozen of hours until you can say you are good at it. A game perfect for speedrunners, high score chasers and 1 credit runners.

For the casual, it can be a hard sell, due the lack of continues and save points but, if you are willing to learn how to become good in beat'em ups, here's one that have everything you need. This game is a school for beat'em up players, both new and veterans. It will teach everything you need to become good at these games and, after you master it, there will be no game too hard for you.

If you are a Neo Geo owner there's not even a need for a review. Go and buy this game.

Final Vendetta may not suit everyone's taste, but I assure you, if you are looking for a true challenge, this is the perfect game.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**





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# VIOLENT STORM™



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# DAWN OF THE MONSTERS



Did you ever dream about saving the world from a Kaiju invasion? Ever wanted to be like Godzilla or Ultraman and tear monsters apart, throwing buildings on your enemies or breathing fire onto them? So, Dawn of the Monsters is the game for you. In this fantastic beat'em up you will be able to choose from 4 beasts and defend the world from a mysterious Kaiju invasion.

With an interesting plot, deep lore and a fast and more technical combat mechanics, Dawn of the Monster is a game for those looking for a good challenge and a fun story that could have come from a great monster movie. You can also call a friend and have even more fun breaking everything in your path.

Dawn of the Monsters out for US\$ 30 dollars and is available now for PC, Stadia, Playstation Family, Xbox Family and Nintendo Switch.





# fourFats マキシマス MAXIMUS 2

If Castle Crashers and Golden Axe had a baby it would be called Maximus 2. This mobile game (soon on the Nintendo Switch) takes the huge world and funny characters of Castle Crashers and mixes some inspired enemies from Golden Axe and it is a blast to play. For up to 4 players local or online, you will hack, slash, beat and cast magic throughout the craziest places you can imagine. Ride an owl, travel on a steampunk train, fight bizarre birds and shop for better gear on this extremely engaging beat'em up.

The developers at The Four Fats updated the game with a new playable character this month and it seems there is more to come down the road. The game is free to try but you can unlock the full version for only US\$ 4.99 and it is available now for Android and IOS devices.





# SIFU

**W**ith one of the most realistic combats you will ever see in a game, Sifu is a rare type of game. Not only is it a great 3D beat'em up, and probably the best, but it also has an intriguing story about revenge and the meaning of life.

Sifu will punish you for every death aging your character and let his attacks more deadly but his body weakens due the age. Use your fists, use anything you can in the environment, or use the scenario itself to finish your enemies in the best John Woo style. This is a single player affair, but one that time and time again you will come back to it. Sifu is available on the Epic Store and Playstation Store for US\$ 45.

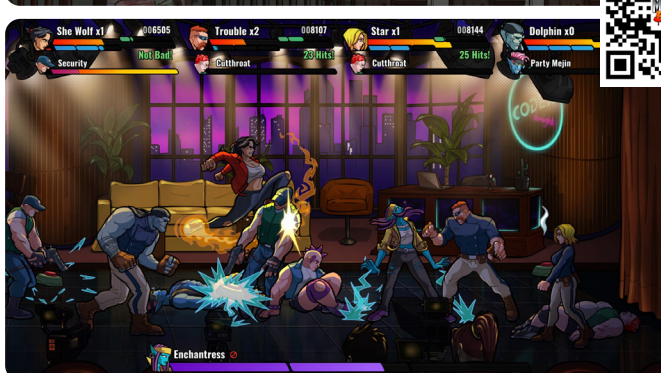






This game has everything a great beat'em up needs. Great controls, dozens of combo sequences, four very well balanced characters, an incredibly good soundtrack and even an engaging and a fun story that allows you to choose your path towards three different endings. One really great thing about Mayhem Brawler is that this game has a very broad appeal. If you are a casual beat'em up player, the game can go easy on you, giving you a lot of time, and lives, to learn every in and out of the enemies. You can even relax between stages enjoying a fun story in an interesting and alive fantasy world.

Don't care about the story and want to test your skills? Go to arcade mode, put on the Legend difficulty and prepare to regret every decision you made in your life that led you to this moment. This game can be extremely fast and incredibly technical. Enemies come in great numbers and are merciless, bosses have multiple phases of attack that will keep you on your toes and the four playable characters combined with three different endings will allow you to pick the best route to reach the ending as fast as you can to compete on the leaderboards. If you don't have this game, you can buy it now digitally for PC, PS4, XBOX One and Nintendo Switch for only US\$ 20 or the physical edition for PS4 and Switch.





# MAYHEM BRAWLER

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

CONFIDENTIAL

Exclusive pages from the beat'em up  
Mayhem Brawler II developer's diary  
signed by Serkan Özay





## Mayhem Brawler II: Dev Diary 1

### >> What Can We Share? <<

If you've been following the latest news about Mayhem Brawler, you've probably heard that we've been working on a sequel for months. I believe it's high time to make a pseudo announcement about what the team has been up to up until this point.

Now hold on to your horses! Drum roll, please. I present to you: Mayhem Brawler II: Best of Both Worlds.

### >> Just Another Beat 'em Up? <<

Yes, our team is following the footsteps of our latest beat 'em up title and developing a sequel. However, our goal is to create a pivotal game that is inspired by the 90s' but certainly not condemned to the period and can leave its own mark on the history of the genre!

Even though they are sister genres, it's easy to observe that beat 'em ups have become an archaic genre that new generations are not familiar with, while fighting games gained popularity over the years.

I believe this is because the fighting game mechanics kept evolving bravely over the years, while beat 'em up mechanics have remained deadlocked since the late 90s'.

OK, we are to blame here as well. Yes, we tried a couple of new things in Mayhem Brawler, but I don't think we pushed the limits of the genre too much.



&gt;&gt;



## >> The Two Timelines of Mayhem City <<

Is this going to be a sequel or a prequel, you ask? Our answer is, why not both! The new adventure will cover the events that developed in-parallel in two different timelines, 20 years apart.

The “Present” will focus on the story of Christina “She Wolf” Vasquez, while the “Past” will focus on Megan “Stellar” Gardner. (Yes, the mother of Grace “Star” Gardner from the first game, the legendary Stronghold officer who gives her life away while defending Mayhem City).

There will be 8 playable characters in total, divided into two groups of 4 in accordance with the timeline they exist in.

I won't be giving any details about how the different timelines will affect the game flow, or which characters will be playable along with She Wolf and Stellar. At least for now.

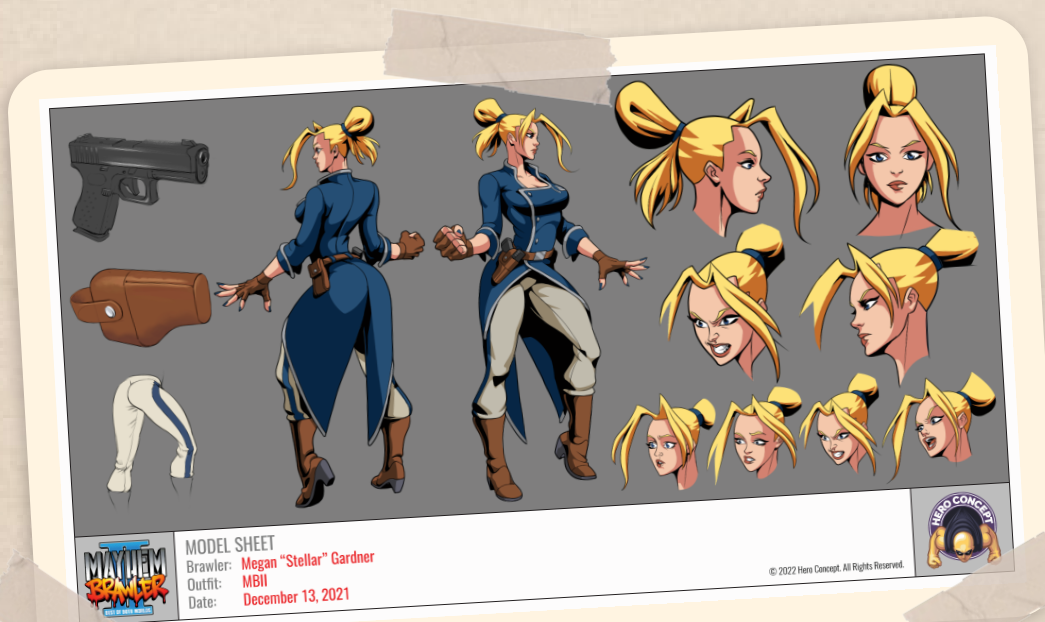
## >> Combat Mechanics <<

We have released two regular and two major updates to bring the combat mechanics of Mayhem Brawler to their current state. During this process, we have accumulated plenty of experience and new ideas about the genre.

First of all, we're going to preserve mechanics we think we got right in Mayhem Brawler, such as air combos, blocks, and conditions, as we polish them up even further.

We will redesign the combo system, which we think is weak, and implement some features we heard from the community that we couldn't evaluate due to technical reasons in the first game.

Additionally, ensuring each of the 8 playable characters has a unique gameplan is among the most important goals we set for ourselves.



>>



## &gt;&gt; Artistic Approach &lt;&lt;

The mood of our new game will be darker than its predecessor due to its story (Stellar will die at the end, you know?). And because of this, we have decided to change our art style.

We experimented with different styles for the character proportion, stylization, and coloring. At this point, I believe we have not gone too far from the visuality of the first game and found a new, striking style. I genuinely hope that you will like the results as well.

Speaking of new style: our backgrounds will be 2.5D for this title. We believe this approach will thoroughly contribute to the depth perception and combat mechanics of the game while enhancing its visuals. We will certainly do our best to preserve the comic book style visual integrity we achieved in the first game, so fear not.



## &gt;&gt; End Game &lt;&lt;

End game content is one of the features we care about the most. This time, we have lots of ideas up our sleeves to enhance replayability for this title.

To begin with, I would like to surprise you guys by saying our encounters will be randomly generated, in a roguelite structure. In other words, when you start a new campaign or even restart your current run, you will encounter different enemies in different spawn points. This rule will apply as well as breakable objects, weapons, and consumables too.

In addition, upon clearing the game for the first time, players will be able to create their own challenges in hundreds of different combinations with our multiple choice-based difficulty system. Not to mention, there will be dozens of unlockables thanks to this new difficulty approach.

Moreover, we have almost completed the design work on a roguelite RPG style skill development system connected to NPC interactions called the "Favors".

&gt;&gt;



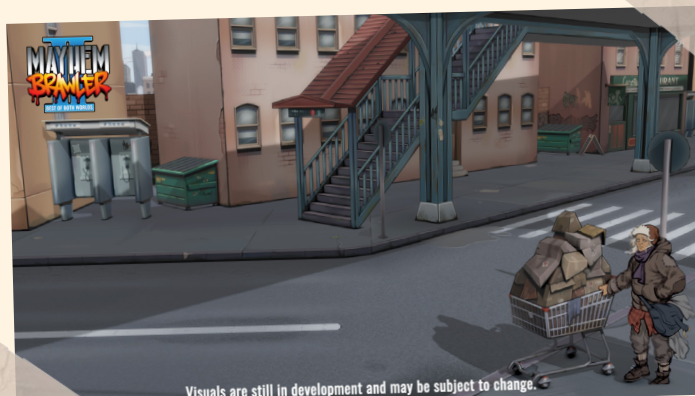
## >> Multiplayer? <<

We want this title to feature online multiplayer as much as you do. The team is currently in the R&D process regarding this topic. If we do not experience a major setback or encounter a technical obstacle that we cannot foresee, the game will be released with an online multiplayer feature! Keep your fingers crossed!

## >> When? <<

Well You may not like to hear this, but it doesn't seem likely that the game will be available before the first quarter of 2024.

But, as we did with Mayhem Brawler, we will do our best to let you experience the sequel on "Xbox Summer Demo Fest" and "Steam Next Fest" before the official release date.



I can assure you that we will come knocking at your door with a game that is worth the wait!

## >> Parting Words <<

We will most certainly inform you about the state of the project in the future. There is a lot of stuff we haven't shared with you, and we cannot wait to reveal them!

Finally, please follow our social media accounts if you are not currently following any of them. Your support is a source of morale beyond words for a small team like ours. Until next time!

Your friendly neighbourhood developer Serkan Özay. ★





# MAYHEM BRAWLER

An urban fantasy themed beat 'em up that brings back the 90s arcade vibe to present day. With comic book style art and kick-ass soundtracks, it offers an amazing experience that you can tackle solo or as co-op with friends while defining the next step in the story with your choices.



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# TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES® SHREDDER'S REVENGE

**W**hen talking about the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles little to no introduction is needed. Even if you are not a fan, you already heard about the adventures of the four reptilian ninjas and their rat sensei! If you were alive back in the late eighties, there was no way you could have escaped the so-called “Turtle Mania” that took the world by storm and generated an unhealthy amount of trinkets we begged our parents to buy.

Today, almost 40 years later, the Turtles still keep kicking shells around, with new iterations of cartoons, movies, comic books and now, after a long wait, a good and old fashioned beat’em up, developed by Tribute Games. We all know by now that 2022 is the year of the beat’em ups, but how does a Turtles beat’em up fare in a world where games like Streets of Rage 4, Mayhem Brawler and Dawn of the Monsters are a reality? Well, we have the answer right here.

## STORY LINE

This is your typical crazy TMNT plot where Shredders plans to take over Manhattan with a complicated plan involving a complete overhaul of the Statue of Liberty. The story here is very similar to Turtles in Time and Hyperstone Heist or Manhattan Project, simple, direct and completely absurd... which is what we want from a Turtles game.

After a short intro telling the story, you’re out in the game. The story will continue with small cutscenes after each boss battle, all of them very enjoyable and short enough to avoid major interruptions of your game. It will not earn any prize but it is the perfect story for a TMNT episode on a Saturday morning.

## GRAPHICS

**W**hen it comes to graphics, the developer, Tribute Games, didn’t spare any effort. This is pixel art goodness through and through. They followed the style of the original Turtles cartoon from the eighties, although a little bit squashed, with very vibrant colors and excellent animation all across the board. Not only our heroes, but even the Foot Soldiers are very well animated with lots of expressions and reactions to your moves. You can see them opening their eyes when you grab them, or how some soldiers make a huge effort to free a sword or a pike stuck in the floor. As we would say if we were kids, it looks like we are playing the cartoon.





The bosses are even better. They are huge, way bigger than the Turtles, have all the details you can expect from the cartoon and not only have lots of frames of animation, but they also have a vast array of them. It seems that Tribute Games spent a lot of time watching the old cartoons and took note of every aspect of the enemies they could. They are all so well represented in this game that, again, seems like a new episode of the Turtles.



Talking about the Turtles, they are perfectly represented here in more ways than you can first imagine. Not only do they look perfectly recreated in this game, but the amount of moves and animation each one of the seven playable characters have is insane. All their attacks are different, each character has its own walk cycle, jump animation, idle animation and so on. The amount of effort put in each sprite sheet here is outstanding. Even the fling slam has a different animation for each one of the characters. Tribute Games did an espectacular job in this game.

Although the animations are excellent, the same can't be said about the backgrounds. They are all well-made and really look like they came right from the cartoons, with lots of details and some easter eggs, but they are all static, with muted colors and basically nothing happening in them. For a game made with so much love, I found the lack of life on the backgrounds a little disappointing. Sure, this is a beat'em up game, and usually the backgrounds aren't the most important thing, but after Streets of Rage 4 magnificent work with the environment, it is hard to go back to such a lifeless one. They aren't bad, not at all, but a little more happening into them would be a very welcome addition.

## SOUNDS & MUSIC

First of all you have all the original voice cast from the 80's cartoon. This was a cheap move from Tribute Games to mess hard with our nostalgia. How can one resist listening to Leo, Donnie, Mike, Raph, April, and the whole gang talking with the voices that permeate our childhood every Saturday morning? This alone can worth the price of the game. Not only are the voices the same, but you will hear the same catch phrases from all the characters that you know, love and never forgot.

It's a trip down memory lane that will make you remember those good times sitting in front of the TV cheering for the Turtles, while mom was cooking lunch! Most of the sound effects are very reminiscent of the cartoon. The slashes from the weapons, the sounds when throwing the enemies at the screen and all the impacts have a perfect cartoon feel that suits well to the rest of the game.

The only minor complaint I could have about the sound is some voice clips, like Donnie or Leo, repeating way too often. Thankfully they do not repeat in every attack, but they have only one line and after two hours playing, especially in the multiplayer, it can get pretty noticeable. Some voices are also too low and hard to understand amidst the music and chaos happening around you.

The music is good. Some are from the cartoons, some are original tracks made for the game and they help create the right mood in each level but you'll hardly remember most of them after you play the game. They're there, they fulfill the hole, but they're not espectacular or something that you'll put on your playlist, aside from two or three tracks that really stood out. In the end, the mix of amazing sound effects and a good soundtrack is what this game needed to keep you pumped, and feeling nostalgic, while you play.





## COMBAT & GAMEPLAY

If you have played any Turtle beat'em up from the past, you know how the combat works. See a foe, walk towards him, give him three or four punches until he drops and repeat until you finish the game. Well, not here. Tribute games modernized the combat and brought the Turtles to the 21st century.



As soon as you start the game you are prompted with a small tutorial showing each and every move your character can perform in game and you have twenty and one of them at your disposal. It's an impressive amount of moves and, considering they all have unique animations, you can imagine how much work was put in this game.

Here you have your traditional combo sequence pressing attack, your flying kicks, shoulder bashes and charged attacks. You have two different dodge moves, a roll that can be activated after you are hit and a cartwheel, just like Turtles in Time, but here it has its own button and can be combined with an attack to create an extremely useful counter. It is an amazing feature that opens up opportunities to start some nice combo sequences. You also have an uppercut move that can be combined with your flying kick and, after you master it, will be your go to move to deal with crowds. But don't abuse it too much, since the enemies, every one of them, knows very well how to deal with this, punching you in the air and ruining your day.

By the way, did I mention you have three different types of throws? Because you do. You have your fling slam, from the original Turtles in Time arcade, the screen throw, from the Super Nintendo version and also you have a frontal throw, that can be used to briefly stun other enemies hit by it. You also have a special attack that can be charged up to three times, indicated by a bar over your energy and will release a devastating blow when used.



If you wait until it fills the three bars and press R1 it will start the "Radical Mode" where your character becomes extremely strong, giving all your moves a boost. Although you get very powerful in this "Radical Mode" you still can be hit by your enemies, different from the special that gives you invincibility. It's a good way to balance things because it could become an even bigger game breaker than what we will discuss ahead. Those bars can be filled by beating your enemies or when you do a taunt. Yes, the Turtles can taunt now and each taunt is incredibly fun to watch, with some of them being direct references to the cartoon like Mike's dance or Raph's getting a slice with his Sai.



As for playable characters, what we have here is a masterclass for beat'em ups. You have seven different characters, being the four green heroes, Master Splinter, April O'Neil and Casey Jones. The last one will be available after you beat the game for the first time. They all have three traits: Speed, Power and Range.





The mix of those three aspects are so well used here that there's no character remotely similar to each other. Leo is your all around guy, as he always was, Donnie is slow but has a great range and power, Mike is fast, has a moderate range but is not so strong and Raph is a monster, powerful, fast but with a very small range. April is your ultra fast, combo rich, but weaker character, Splinter is very slow, with a good range and great power and finally Casey, who is almost like Leo, but his range is comparable to Donnie, making him one of the most powerful characters in the game. There are characters for all types of players here and they can all be leveled up to gain more moves, energy, lives and special bars, which, at the beginning of the game, you have only one.



And you'll need all those upgrades to beat the sixteen levels of the game. Yes, the game is huge and not only do you have to beat the levels, but each one of them have three challenges to complete and most of them have hidden items that you must find to complete small side-quests some secondary characters, like Vernon or Irma, will give to you. Completing these quests will grant you experience points and they are essential to fully level up your characters without repeating levels. But you won't be doing this alone, the game is up to six players locally or online and this will be one of the most fun experiences you will have in a beat'em up.

Yes, it is messy and chaotic, but it is so fun that you can even throw your strategies down the sewers and only mash buttons and you'll still have a great time seeing six characters jumping and running all over your screen. Sure, you'll lose track of your character sometimes, but that really doesn't matter when you're having so much fun.



The online aspect of the game is one of the best I have ever seen in my life. You can create a lobby at the start of the game if you want and invite your friends or just jump into the world map select a level and with the press of a button you can have a list of the people who are playing that same level, including how many players are in and how much of the stage they completed. It is one of the best examples of how to make a great multiplayer integration in a game.

Unfortunately, not everything is perfect here. Even after making a lot of compliments to everything in the game, we have to say that the combat is a little unbalanced. The addition of the taunt and how it fills your special bar made the game absurdly easy even on the gamrly difficulty. You can feel your gauge at will simply spamming taunts after you beat a wave of enemies. This quickly drains any strategy the game could offer.







In multiplayer this can become even worse, with six people on the screen taunting every second and unleashing the special every minute, the screen becomes a huge mess of special effects that leaves you without any options except join the group and spam special. There's no way to fight your enemies if they are being thrown left and right in this mess and you will be lucky if you can find yourself amidst so much happening on your screen. Sure, you can avoid spamming your taunts and use it only when you think it will be really necessary, but that's something that should be in the design of the game and not something that should be left to the player.



The taunts should at least have a cooldown, preventing you from spamming it at will. The AI is also not that great. They can put up some challenge in the harder difficulty but not because of some strategy they came up with. Their only strategy is to group up on you and use their extra strength to put you down. They are not harder to kill, or have different behavior, they are just way stronger and aggressive and, if you had a winning strategy so far, you can use it here without changing too much. In the end, the game is a little on the easier side but the amount of fun you can have with the combat, alone or with other 5 people, is enough to keep you engaged with this game. ✦



## CONCLUSION

**S**hredder's Revenge is a love letter to Turtles' fans. It has everything the fans have waited for years, a true homage to the cartoon that started the turtlemania in the late eighties. The design choices, the original cast dubbing the characters and even the sound effects, everything was made to open the doors of nostalgia in our minds and drive us right back to our childhood.

The game is a blast to play alone, with friends or randoms and you will not find a multiplayer so easy to get in and get out as you will here. If you are a fan of the four green heroes, you probably already have this game and, if you don't, this is a purchase that you will never regret and you will surely put a lot of hours into. If you are not a fan of the Turtles what you have here is good beat'em up, with lots and lots of moves, combos and characters to play. Even with the taunt system being a little loose, you'll still have a lot of fun with this game. This is a lighthearted beat'em up which may not put your fingers to the test but will certainly put a smile on your face.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**





# TAKING BEAT'EM UPS TO NEW HEIGHTS



***THE FLYING KICK***  
NETWORK

The Flying Kick Network is an independent gaming media specialized in beat'em ups from all eras. Follow us both on Twitter and Youtube to get the latest news, the best previews and reviews for all things beat'em ups. If you are a developer, talk to our team so we can help promote your game in all social medias. The Flying Kick Network, we got your back here.





# Dave Cook's Comics and Games

**I**n this issue we talked a little with the author Dave Cook, from Scotland. He's the author of *Go Straight: The Ultimate Guide To Side-Scrolling Beat'Em Ups*, published by Bitmap Books and also the author of various comic books that range from the post-apocalyptic sci-fi to beat'em ups. Dave published recently the first issue of *Beats Per Minute*, an incredible comic book, with a intriguing story and characters that seems to be out from our favorite beat'em ups. He also is running now a campaign on Kickstarter for his latest comic, *Ninja Baseball Spirits*, that is an spiritual sequel to the classic Arcade Game, *Ninja Baseball Bat Man*. He had a lot to share with us, so, let's go!

**BA - When did you start your career with Comics and Video games? Can you tell a little about your story?**

**DC -** I started considering comics around 2012, when I was a games journalist. I had just finished writing my very first novel that I'd worked on for about a year, but I realised after reading it through that I wasn't very good (at the time) at describing people, places and atmospheres, so I decided to cancel the novel and thought "hey, I can get someone to draw these things for me and make a comic instead." So in a weird way, I started comics because I was crap at descriptive writing. I'm good at it now, but back then that novel draft was rough.

Once I knew I wanted to do comics, I asked around for advice online and found a small anthology called *Overload* that was looking for contributions, so I pitched them a short called *Comfort*, which is about a teddy bear that hasn't been played with by its owner for many years, so in an act of revenge it frames her for murder. It's like a horror spin on *Toy Story*. It got accepted, so I started thinking about my own comic, which was the post apocalyptic comic, *Bust*, which was my first self published work. It did well at comic cons, so I decided to keep going, and now here we are!

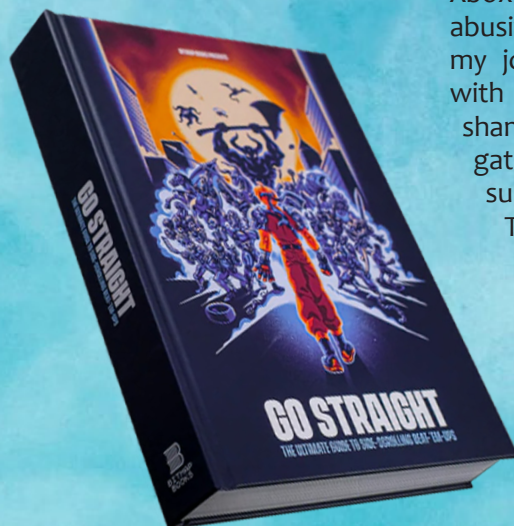
**BA - Was writing always a passion?**

**DC -** Always yeah. I used to steal graph paper from my school when I was about 7/8 years old and draw *Super Mario Bros* levels on it and write side stories for Mario's adventure. I even wrote a short comic about a space American football league and some other things. I was always scribbling away on pads of paper with my silly ideas as a kid. Then in high school I was a massive gamer and keen writer, so I figured games journalism might be a career option, and that's exactly what I ended up doing in 2007 when I started freelancing and then full time in 2010 when I joined *NowGamer* as a staff writer. I then went on to *VG247* until I left the industry in 2014. It was great fun going to E3, gamescom and all those cool trade shows. I also won three industry awards for my games writing. It was a tough, but great gig that I'll never forget.



**BA - Why did you quit professional journalism?**

**DC -** It was a mixture of things. Mostly though, it was the daily abuse from gamers on Twitter that sunk it. If I posted up a story that praised Sony for doing something, Xbox fan boys would flood my inbox with threats and insults, or even suggesting I was being bribed by Sony - and vice versa if I said something nice about Xbox from Sony fan boys. It's just abusive and tiresome and I still see my journalist friends putting up with it today. It's honestly such a shame to see these toxic people gatekeeping and souring what is supposed to be a fun hobby. The pay also borders on insulting at times too. It's shockingly low paid work.





**BA** - Your previous comics (Bust, Vessel and more recently Killtopia) weren't related to videogames, at least, not directly, what made you decide to write BPM, a clearly beat'em up inspired Comic Book?

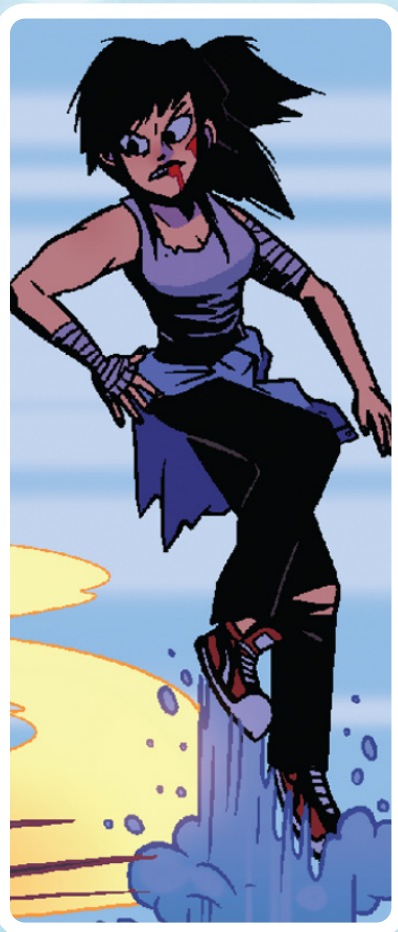
**DC** - A friend suggested I try writing a story that wasn't dystopian, just to test myself and flex my writing a bit more. I'm a big fan of action movies and martial arts films - especially ones where there is no CGI and it's all real stunts and wirework. Initially, BPM was my attempt at doing just that - capturing the intensity of combat and action in a static comic format, with precise action choreography and set pieces. But then as I started considering the project more, I decided to tie it back to my favourite game of all time - Streets of Rage 2. Side-scrolling beat'em ups are by far my favourite genre, so it all made sense once I thought of the project as a brawler tribute.

**BA** - Beat'em ups aren't exactly famous for their good and complex story. Why do you think they are a good fit for comic books?

**DC** - I think it's different when you're playing a beat'em up - too much story gets in the way of the fast pace and intensity, but you could read a comic that's all action in like two minutes so it's not a good experience. Just like my favourite action movies, there has to be stakes and a reason to cheer the heroes on and to see them succeed. That's where a bit of plot can really help raise the stakes and make you care about what's happening. It makes you feel frightened or excited when the hero you like is in danger. It's a powerful thing in movies like The Raid or Die Hard.

**BA** - We can see Streets of Rage's influence on BPM, what else did inspire you?

**DC** - Action movies for sure, everything from Big Trouble In Little China and John Wick, to The Raid, Die Hard, Commando and Jackie Chan's Police Story. The references to those movies are not easter eggs on the page, but they were definitely in my mind while writing BPM.



**BA** - The first issue is already out and the second is coming in soon, how did your public react to the first issue?

**DC** - We were really glad that people understood the references we were trying to pay tribute to. One reviewer even referred to BPM as a grainy, bootleg VHS tape that has old action movies and old anime taped on it. I really liked that comparison, as the whole point of BPM and all Team Beats comics is to tap into your nostalgia and make you feel like a kid again.

**BA** - You also wrote the most complete guide to beat'em ups ever published: Go Straight The Ultimate Guide to Side-Scrolling Beat'em Ups, can you tell us about why you took such a monumental task?

**DC** - I just genuinely love the beat'em up genre and I noticed that no book existed that documented it in all its glory. I had the idea around 2017, but thought there was no way I could possibly do it. But after seeing a few of my game journalist friends publish genre books and gaming reference books, I asked them how they did it, what their process was and more. After speaking with them it felt less scary. However, the thing that really convinced me was the first announcement of Streets of Rage 4. I thought "This is it, the genre is truly back. This has to be the way I end my book, with the return of Streets of Rage." This is also why I chose to end the book with Streets of Rage 4. It's a nice ending that shows there are many more games to come. If you look at how many brawlers are in development now, thankfully this turned out to be true.

**BA** - How was the pitch process and how Bitmap Books reacted to your idea?

**DC** - It was surprisingly easy. I emailed them directly with some sample write-ups and some designed spreads that my friend Dan made and they very quickly said yes. I was stunned as they were the first publisher I pitched!







**BA** - I am pretty sure it wasn't an easy task writing such a big book. How long did you take and what difficulties did you face in the process?

**DC** - It took two years since the initial idea and finishing all the writing. I think my next book will be quicker though, as I definitely learned a lot about planning out each section, setting up all emulation properly so I could capture quality screen shots and more. I also hired a few freelancers to write some guest pieces to cover some of the trickier formats. For example, YouTuber Sega Lord X covered all the Saturn games for me. I have a Saturn at home, but I didn't have the means to capture screenshots, so he was such a great help. Another difficulty was making sure we covered as many games as possible. It was never meant to be every single game in the genre, but we got close.

**BA** - Any regrets? Any game you wished you covered but you couldn't for some reason?

**DC** - I missed Ane-San and Pirates of Dark Water, which I feel silly about, haha! Hopefully you'll see them and others if we ever do a second edition but watch this space.

**BA** - What was your decision process to include or exclude a game?

**DC** - Some games blur the lines between beat 'em up and another genre. Weirdly, some people considered Shinobi a beat 'em up but I disagreed, it's definitely an action-platformer. I was also going to include a section called 'Genre Breakers; that included 3D hack 'n' slash games like Dynasty Warriors, as well as games like Bayonetta and Devil May Cry, as they were undoubtedly inspired by and spawned from side-scrolling beat 'em ups. But I figured that was pushing the lines too far. Maybe that could be a whole other book one day?

**BA** - How is the feeling seeing such a big book reaching the hands of your readers? We can see a lot of people posting it on social media.

**DC** - Oh it's been wild to see just how popular Go Straight has been. It's honestly made me so happy to see fellow fans of this great genre enjoying what I've written and to see them trying new brawlers they discovered because of the book. That was the goal, to help shine a light on the genre and the lesser-known titles that deserve attention, like Denjin Makai and Gaia Crusaders.

It does feel weird to be the guy who wrote the book on the genre too. That's still sinking in, haha!

**BA** - You are currently writing another monumental book about run and guns. Do you plan to return to beat 'em ups someday?

**DC** - I have another pitch in the works but it's at negotiation phase. I can't really say anything about it yet though, but stay tuned! It would be another dream project if it happened though, as the subject is something very close to my heart.

**BA** - Together with this new book, you are working on something very special for beat 'em up fans. Can you talk a little about the story behind Baseball Ninja Spirits?

**DC** - So back in 2012, I interviewed Ninja Baseball Bat Man creator **Drew Maniscalco** for Retro Gamer magazine. He worked at Irem in the 90's and is a fascinating guy. However, the piece never ran but I kept in touch with Drew to try and get some more coverage and help more people discover the game. After BPM #1-4 was written, I told artist Steve Gregson that I knew Drew and he said, "hey, why don't we ask him about the adaptation rights?"



I got in touch with Drew and he remembered me, we got talking about our concept for the comic and he agreed to let us play in the Ninja Baseball Bat Man sandbox. It truly is a dream to get free space to adapt and reboot one of my all-time favourite brawlers. We were allowed to show the ninjas out of their suits, give them back stories and personalities and basically reboot the whole thing. It truly has been amazing to work on the series and we can't thank Drew enough for the opportunity.

**BA - What was your previous experience with the game?**

**DC -** I found out about it the same way most people did back in the day, through the Angry Video Game Nerd's YouTube review of the game. I loved the gameplay and the name alone made me download it. I was dismayed to see that it never received a home port, which is a shame, but it's nice to see the game generating such a big fan base over the years.

**BA - What are your future plans? Do you want to tackle more famous IPs? Where are you going from now on?**

**DC -** I'm a little tapped out on writing comics to be honest, so BPM #2-4 will roll out through Kickstarter over the next year or two, and Ninja Baseball Spirits will be the same. Both series are completely written so my work is largely done on them, but I'll be focusing on my new game book and potentially another one instead for a while, to recharge my ideas. I'll come back to comics eventually for sure. I can never seem to stay away. ✨



## Drew has a say

**BA - Ninja Baseball Bat Man is a very unconventional beat'em up. From the playable character to the enemies, they are all very unusual. What was your inspiration to make such a game?**



**DM -** I was working at IREM AMERICA a video game company and one day I was reading an article about the top box office movies of that time, Ninja Turtles and Batman were the top earning movies. It was then, I decided to try to create my own Superhero!

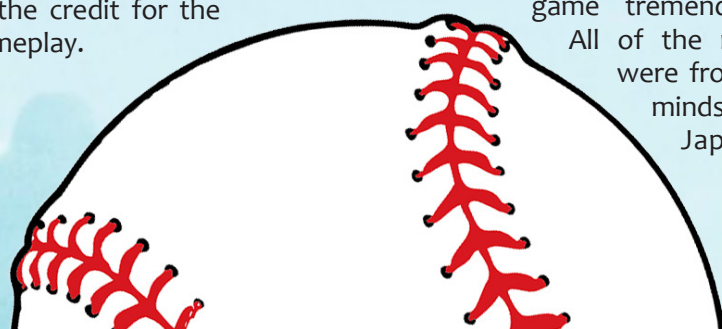
My Superhero would need the following: a skill, a weapon and a costume. His skill for fighting was his martial arts background. A baseball bat came to mind so I had the weapon. Who uses a baseball bat? A baseball player, who also wears a uniform so I had a costume and he was a man, I put all of these things together and came up with..... "Ninja Baseball Bat Man".



The game itself was created by the IREM Japan programmers. I gave them the concept for the characters and the story line and they ran with it. They deserve all of the credit for the gameplay.

While some of my Bosses and smaller enemies were used in the game they added many of their own characters which were very wacky and enhanced the game tremendously.

All of the moves were from the minds of the Japanese team.







**BA** - The game, unfortunately, didn't have a great following at the time, selling only 1042 arcade machines around the world according to wikipedia. What do you think was the reason for that?

**DM** - In the USA, I felt the game was very difficult for the American players. Many players couldn't get passed the first stage. When you are paying to play, you are looking for some entertainment value for your money. After a few tries, players just gave up. The game did well internationally but sold far less than the other fighting games at that time.

**BA** - In the mid 2000's the game was re-discovery and now is considered by many a cult-classic and one of the best of its time (including me). How do you feel about it? Knowing that today a whole new generation knows and loves your game?

**DM** - I was amazed! I think it was 2015, I was on Google and typed in the words Ninja Baseball Bat Man. I was shocked by all of the content (articles, reviews and fan art) on the web regarding the game. It was then, I decided to create a website for the fans to see some of the original drawings and the story behind the scenes. What is really cool, is the fan art work. It is very humbling that someone would invest their time drawing the characters, I created.



**BA** - The game was re-discovered thanks to emulation. Do you have an opinion about emulation overall? It is kind of a hot topic for devs and players.

**DM** - I can see why the major companies like Sega, Namco and others might not approve of it. But for me, had it not been for MAME we would not be doing this interview. The fact is, MAME Saved NBBM from the coin op graveyard!

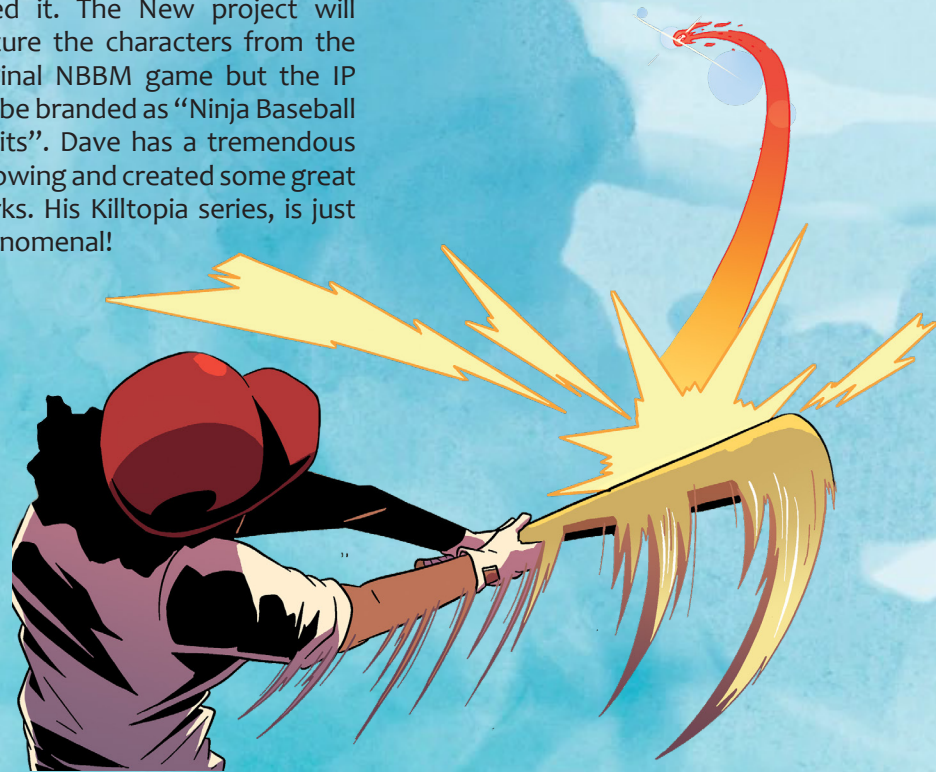
**BA** - Dave Cook is now making a Comic Book based in the universe you created. How do you feel about that?

**DM** - I have known Dave for a long time. He rang me up and pitched the idea to me and I loved it. The New project will feature the characters from the original NBBM game but the IP will be branded as "Ninja Baseball Spirits". Dave has a tremendous following and created some great works. His Killtopia series, is just phenomenal!

I am very excited to work with Dave and Steve (Gregson) on this project. By the way, Dave and Steve just released a great new comic called "Beatdowns Per Minute" if you're a fan of beat'em ups, you will love it!

**BA** - We now have amazing teams creating amazing beat em up games. Have you ever thought about approaching one for a sequel? Or a sequel was never in your plans?

**DM** - Actually a Korean team has reached out to me and we may do something. It would not be a NBBM sequel but like the comic, it would include the characters created for the NBBM arcade game. I will keep you posted on any new developments. ✚





# CAPCOM



# Cadillac AND Dinosaurs™

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# Buccaneers

## Shipshape

**MERSON**  
ENTERTAINMENT

If you ever dream of crossing the Seven Seas as a fearsome Pirate but think that canons are too loud and you rather use your fists then, *Buccaneers: Shipshape*, is the game for you. This game is re-imagination of an old Arcade 2D beat'em up, *Buccaneers*, and now features a 2.5D plane, improved graphics and sounds, three new playable characters and, if you are feeling nostalgic, you can unlock the classic mode and have some good 80's challenge.

*Buccaneers: Shipshape* is set sail later this year and will be available for PC with a possibility to see a console launch down the road.







# 消えゆく真昼

Fading Afternoon

**A**fter *The Friends of Ringo Ishikawa* and *The Arrest of Stone Buddha* the developer Yeo is once again creating an open world beat'em up and, this time, you'll be following the steps of Seiji Maruyama, a middle-aged yakuza recently released from prison that now ponders if anything really matters in his life. The game will feature a vast world to explore, mini games to play, a deep combat system, realistic weapon damage and an incredible animation that makes everything fluid and a joy to watch.

The game still doesn't have a release date but we can expect it early next year for PC and Nintendo Switch.





# FALLEN CITY BRAWL



If you are looking for a new beat'em up game but with a more classic flavor, look no more, *Fallen City Brawl*, from the newcomer developer *Fallen City Studio*, is exactly what you need. Featuring 4 playable characters and co-op for 2 players the game features huge sprites, a dark visual and heavy soundtrack which would fit perfectly at the arcades of the old days. The game is set to be released this year for PC, Playstation, Xbox and Nintendo Switch, but you can already have a small taste of what is coming with a demo available on Steam.





Maybe you want something even more classic than the last game so, of course we have something for you, Streets of Chaos from the brazilian developer Bonfa Games is inspired in the classics from the console era like Streets of Rage, Final Fight and Double Dragon and will feature lots of different modes to play, including soccer, if you had any doubt this is a brazilian game. The game has a 16bits art style with fast and varied combat. This game still has no release date confirmed and will be available for PC with the possibility of a Genesis/Mega Drive version sometime in the future.





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## READERS VIEWS



**End Of Level Boss** @EndOfLevelBOss ·

Em resposta a [@BrawlersAlley](#)

I know what I'll be reading after my 5 hour flight back home today. Mayhem Brawler II is a nice surprise so keen to find out more.

Good luck with issue #1. 🎉



**Dan** @DanClem033

Em resposta a [@BrawlersAlley](#)

Glad I recently joined Twitter. It has been great to discovery this stuff and all the gaming related info here 👍



**Luke Hebblethwaite** @lukethehebble

Em resposta a [@BrawlersAlley](#)

This sounds great - count me in! :D





TOTALLY NEW  
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DUDES!

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA  
**TURTLES**

# TURTLES IN TIME



- Kit or Dedicated
- 1-4 Players
- Buy-in and Continuation Features
- Horizontal Monitor

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